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## Treatment of People with Different Sexual Orientation: Is It Still a Concern?

Jessica Preuschoff  
*Lindenwood University*

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**Treatment of People with Different Sexual Orientation: Is It Still a Concern?**Jessica Preuschoff<sup>10</sup>

*The following research paper deals with the feelings that undergraduate students on the Lindenwood University campus have about people that have a different sexual orientation than their own. It is hypothesized that Lindenwood University is a very open minded community. Lindenwood University has a campus with a very diverse student community, but the study came to the result that most students are very open minded about people that have a sexual orientation that differs from their own. This study was conducted with the help of convenient sampling through the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP). While the study does support the hypothesis one has to note that out of the 50 participants only one person was actually homosexual, which lead to the believe that the type of participant may have skewed the results. Therefore it is to be considered to redo the study at a different point in time with fixed groups on campus, like a sports team, instead of using a random assignment.*

People have always had problems accepting people that are different from them. This can be due to skin color, body shape and weight, or sexual orientation. This research project focuses on the latter. Homosexuality is defined as “Erotic attraction to, and preference for, developing romantic relationships with, members of the same sex” (Rathus, Nevid, & Fichner-Rathus, 2011, p.280). Heterosexuality is defined as “Erotic attraction to, and preference for, developing romantic relationships with, members of the opposite sex” (Rathus, et al., 2011, p.280). These are the definitions that will be used in this research to refer to the two sexual orientations.

It has been found out that heterosexual people react differently to people of a different sexual orientation depending on the exposure that they had (Jefford, 1995). Past findings indicate

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<sup>10</sup> Jessica Preuschoff, Department of Psychology, Lindenwood University.

Correspondence regarding this research article should be addressed to Jessica Preuschoff, Department of Psychology, Lindenwood University, [JP428@lionmail.lindenwood.edu](mailto:JP428@lionmail.lindenwood.edu).

that there are differences depending on if the exposed person is a man or a woman and it also depends on the knowledge that one has of homosexuality, and prejudice decreases over time in college students (Jefford, 1995). Jefford (1995) did a study to retest the stated information above by theorizing that there is a correlation between the levels of exposure and the decrease of anti-homosexual prejudice and used the scores on the Index of Attitudes toward Homosexuals (IAH) as his dependent variable and for his independent variables he used exposure, gender, and social class standing.

Evans (2009) found out in a related study that people's attitude towards women that are homosexual are more positive than towards men that are homosexual and that women also showed a more positive attitude towards people that are homosexual compared to men.

Jefford (1995) found out that people had more exposure to people that are homosexual as socioeconomic class standing increased. Furthermore, the more people were exposed to homosexuality the less homophobic they were and women were also found to be less homophobic than men (Jefford, 1995). He also found that most people that are heterosexual are exposed to people that are homosexual because they work together and less so because they were friends or related (Jefford, 1995). From his findings, Jefford (1995) has learned that that attitude change towards people that are homosexual is largely due to exposure.

This view is also supported by others. Heinze and Horn (2009) did a study that focused on the contact of groups with different sexual orientation and the treatment of each. The questionnaire which assessed adolescence was also about the acceptance of homosexuality, and acceptance of bullying of adolescents that are homosexual as well as their level of comfort around adolescents that are homosexual (Heinze & Horn, 2009). As found by Jefford (1995), Heinze and Horn (2009) also found that if the adolescent had a friend that was homosexual his or

her overall feeling about homosexuality was positive and these adolescent was also less tolerant towards bullying of adolescents that were homosexual.

It is not only the exposure that one has to people that are homosexual that influences the extent of prejudice people possess. It also depends on the people that have a big influence in a person's life. A child spends a lot of time in school. In fact a child spends at least 12 years in school. The young adult then goes on to college and throughout this whole time teachers and hence professors have a big influence on the child.

A study conducted in Barcelona tried to find out how teachers felt about homosexuality (Pérez-Testor, et al., 2010). They took a sample of 254 elementary and high school teachers and presented them with two scales, one that focuses on overt and subtle prejudice while the other focuses on perceived discrepancy of values (Pérez-Testor, et al., 2010). The results indicated that women seemed more likely to have inconsistencies between their likely behavior and their personal values compared to men and this inconsistency was also greater in people that are religious and go to a church regularly (Pérez-Testor, et al., 2010). Furthermore, the discrepancy was also found in people that have no contact with people who are homosexual (Pérez-Testor, et al., 2010). The overall results of the study was that 88% of the teachers did not have any prejudice against people that are homosexual, but that 22% of teachers that did have enough knowledge of the subject and thus, teacher education on this topic ought to be offered (Pérez-Testor, et al., 2010). This shows that depending on the knowledge of the teacher the children will be educated accordingly which may result in homophobic behavior.

The question is now where this negative view of homosexuality comes from.

Verweij, et al. (2008) tried to find out by having 4,688 twins fill out a survey that dealt with sexual behavior, and sexual attitudes towards homosexuality. The result of the survey

supported the notion that men have a more negative view on homosexuality than women (Verweij, et al., 2008). The researchers found that age has no effect on the views on homosexuality and that views on homosexuality are possibly inherited and that social environment has little to no effect (Verweij, et al., 2008).

The current research was conducted in order to determine if people that are more exposed to homosexuality are less prejudiced and more open-minded than the people that are not exposed. It also addressed if there is a difference in viewpoint between gender and overall age groups. As stated above college students seem to have decreased feeling of prejudice towards different sexual orientations so this study takes place on a college campus. As Lindenwood University is a very diverse campus the researcher hypothesizes that the campus consists of a community that is open-minded towards people of a different sexual orientation as their own.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of 50 undergraduate college students. Out of these 50 students, there were 22 men and 28 women that participated in the study. The students were recruited through the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP) by posting sign-up sheets on the LPP bulletin board across from the LPP office. Members of the LPP are able to receive extra credits in some of their college classes, for example introductory courses in social science classes as well as some higher level classes. Only certain classes and professors allow the participation in the LPP so that their students can receive extra credit. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 44 years. The participants' ethnicities were 78 % Caucasian, 8 % African-American, 6 % Hispanic, and 4% Asian, and 4% Mexican. The countries of origins were as follows: Azerbaijan, Brazil, Canada, China, Italy, Japan, Jamaica, Panama and U.S.A. Of all the

participants, 31 were single, 14 were in a relationship, 1 was engaged, 1 was married, 1 was dating, 1 was separated, and 1 answered it's complicated. Forty-nine of the participants identified themselves as heterosexual and one said she was homosexual.

## **Materials**

The materials in this study consisted of two informed consent forms (see Appendix A), a demographic survey (see Appendix B), one main survey “How prejudiced are students at Lindenwood University?” (see Appendix C), a feedback letter (see Appendix D), and an extra credit slip for the participants. Also used for this study were a description sheet and a sign-up sheet which were attached to the bulletin board outside the LPP office. The researcher also used an experimenter’s list of participants to verify which participants showed up for their appointment. The informed consent form ensured that the participant was informed on the type of survey that they took, that he or she was 18 years-old or older, and let him or her know that hi or she can end the survey at any time free of any penalties against them. The demographic survey asked about gender, age, ethnicity, country of origin, relationship status, as well as sexual orientation. The main survey had 10 questions, and asked the participants about their experience on the Lindenwood University campus regarding prejudice attitudes based on sexual orientation. Most of the questions for the surveys had been self made. The first two questions of the main survey (How prejudiced are students at Lindenwood University?) were created by researchers Huerta and Morrill, who were also students at Lindenwood University at the time (2009).

The feedback letter thanked participants for taking part in the study and provided them with the researcher’s contact information in case they wanted to know the results of the study. The research took place on the campus of Lindenwood University. The research rooms that were used for this study were in the Psychology laboratories in Young Hall. The rooms that were used

were Loftus and Pavlov in the psychology laboratory and library rooms 1, 2 and, 4. The psychology laboratory rooms were rather small, had no windows, and consisted of two desks and two chairs. Some of the library rooms had windows but all of the library rooms had a big round table making them look like conference room.

### **Procedure**

Each participant was surveyed individually. The participants were given two consent forms, one for their records and one for the records of the researcher upon entering the research laboratory. The researcher explained to the participants what was written on this form and the participants were then given some time to read the consent form themselves. After they had read the consent form they were asked if they had understood everything and only if they answered with a yes were they asked to sign the consent form. The researcher also signed the informed consent form. The participants were then given the demographic survey. They were told that they were not supposed to write down their name on this survey but to answer each question truthfully. If they did not feel comfortable answering some of the questions they were asked to skip ahead. They were also encouraged to ask questions if they did not know how to answer a question. After the participants filled out the demographic survey they were given the main survey.

They were again asked to not write their name on the survey to ensure anonymity. The participants were told that they could stop the survey at any time if they felt uncomfortable and also told that they could ask questions if something was unclear to them and that they could also skip a question if they were uncomfortable answering one or more of them. After the participants had finished the survey they were handed a feedback form and debriefed. They were asked if they had any questions and were reminded that the researcher's contact information could be

found on the feedback form if questions came up later on. The researcher filled out the experimenter's participant list as well as the extra credit slip for the participants. The researcher handed the extra credit slip to the participant and the research procedure was over.

### **Results**

This research was intended to find out how open minded the Lindenwood student community is. It addressed if people that are more exposed to homosexuality are less prejudiced and more open-minded towards people of a different sexual orientation. It also addressed if there is a difference between gender and overall age groups. The first question on the main questionnaire dealt with the statement if someone was bothered by the fact that a teammate on a sports team might be homosexual. Out of the 50 participants, 19 said that they strongly disagreed with this statement and said they would not be bothered if a teammate was homosexual. Thirteen other participants disagreed with the statement. Only two people agreed with the statement and said that they would feel uncomfortable if one of their teammates was homosexual. Three people had strong feelings against having a homosexual teammate (see figure 1).

Question number two stated that one would feel uncomfortable when confronted with a professor that is homosexual. Out of all the participants, 21 strongly disagreed with the statement and 14 disagreed. These students do not mind having a professor that is homosexual. Three people agreed with the statement that they would feel uncomfortable if they knew that one of their professors was homosexual and three more people strongly agreed with the statement (see figure 2).

Question number three stated that one would feel uncomfortable if seeing a homosexual couple being affectionate with each other. The majority of people, 12 participants, disagreed with this statement. Eight participants strongly disagreed with the statement, and ten participants



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mildly disagreed with the statement. Seven people agreed with the statement that they would feel uncomfortable watching a homosexual couple being overly affectionate with each other. Another six people strongly agreed with the statement (see figure 3).

Question number four states that one does not feel comfortable with any couple being overly affectionate with each other. The majority of participants, 20 participants agreed with this statement. Fourteen participants mildly agreed with the statement, and 11 participants strongly agreed with the statement that they did not feel comfortable if any couple is overly affectionate in public (see figure 4).

Question number five dealt with the question if Lindenwood was a community in which all students are accepted. Twenty-two people strongly agreed with this statement. Fourteen participants only mildly agreed with the statement that Lindenwood is an accepting community. Nine participants were very confident that Lindenwood is an accepting community and answered with strongly agree (figure 5).

Question number six dealt with the statement that one would feel uncomfortable when living in the same dorm room as a person that is homosexual. The answers on this question were very diverse. Ten participants strongly disagreed with the statement, and 11 people disagreed with this statement. Nine participants mildly disagreed with the statement, while five participants mildly agreed with the statement. Eight participants agreed with the statement that they would feel uncomfortable when sharing a dorm room with a person that is homosexual. Seven people strongly agreed with the statement (see figure 6).

Question number seven dealt with the statement that one believes that minority groups on the campus of Lindenwood University should be supported. The majority of participants, 18 participants, said that they strongly agreed with this statement. Ten participants mildly disagreed

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with the statement while nine participants mildly agreed with the statement. Eight participants strongly agreed with the statement that minority groups on campus should be supported (see figure 7).

Question number eight stated that one thinks themselves to be well educated about homosexuality. Eighteen participants agreed with the statement, and 17 mildly agreed with the statement. Eight participants strongly agreed with the statement, while six people disagreed with the statement that they were well educated about homosexuality (see figure 8).

Question number nine asked the participants if they had ever seen a person that is a homosexual person being harassed on the campus of Lindenwood University. Out of all the participants only six answered this question with a yes and 44 participants answered this question with a no. Question number ten asked the participants if they had a friend that was homosexual. The results were exactly even because 25 participants answered yes, while the other 25 participants answered no.

### **Discussion**

The study shows that students at Lindenwood University feel very strongly about this subject. They either agree or disagree on the questions where they are asked about direct contact with people that are homosexual. They only mildly agree or mildly disagree when only asked about their opinions, like for example questions six through eight. A lot of the participants agreed with the statement that Lindenwood University is a very accepting community. This question could potentially be biased because they might think it would reflect badly on them if they would say this about their college, even though they had been told before they started the survey that their name would not be recorded with the data.

As the results are indicating this study does have a significant outcome. Lindenwood University is indeed a very open minded community. The current study did have some limitations. For one thing only one person who is homosexual took part in this research study. While a lot of the participants did say they have friends of a different sexual orientation or are well educated about homosexuality, they may not be able to totally identify with homosexual people and the way they really feel on campus. Therefore, one should consider using convenient sampling, like targeting specific groups on to fill out the survey. One of these groups could be the spectrum alliance as this is a group that supports the homosexual community on the campus of Lindenwood University or focus on a sport team instead to see how accepting these individuals are. The study was not designed to correlate questions from the actual survey with the demographic survey. The campus of Lindenwood University did not give a sample that had enough participants in each group. Group refers to for example gender, age, and ethnicity. Any results that would have been reached by comparing ethnicities with each other would not have given a significant result. So the study did give information about the open mindedness on campus as a whole but one cannot say that females are more open-minded than males or the other way around. If the study is redone in the future this should be taken into account.

In a future approach to this study some questions need to be reworded and definitions included. Some of the students taking the study were unfamiliar with the terms homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality. It would be a good idea to offer short definitions on the demographic survey sheet to clarify some of these terms. Also the term ethnicity needs to be explained as some people did not know what it meant and answered with “American” which is citizenship and does not say anything about their ethnicity. Some people had problems

understanding what relationship status meant. In future studies this question could be changed into something simpler, like giving them options that they have to checkmark.

The fourth question from the actual survey should be reworded as it talks about couples being “overly affectionate with each other” in contrast to question number three which only states homosexual couples being affectionate with each other. Since the word “overly” is thrown into the second question these two questions cannot be properly compared. Overall, it is to consider though why people do not like to see couples being affectionate with each other because this could affect the results. They could be jealous of the couple because they might just have broken up with a significant other, or just wanting a partner. It could also be that the term affectionate was misunderstood, as it was supposed to only mean holding hands or giving a loved one a tiny kiss on the lips. Some participants thought that that “overly affectionate” means that the couple would go as far as performing sexual acts in public. An explanation should be included if the study were to be redone.

Minority groups are not very well represented in this study and the next time a better random sample should be collected. Most people answering the survey were also from the U.S.A. It would be interesting to see if having more international students answer the questions would actually change the results.

Jefford (1995) said that exposure to homosexuality changes with class standing and that homophobic behavior decreases with exposure level. The current study relates to his findings because the study was done on a college campus and the participants taking this study seemed to be very open- minded about homosexuality. One can also assume that class standing is higher in people that are in college. This could imply that people that are heterosexual are more exposed to people that are homosexual in college.

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Heinze and Horn (2009) said that if an adolescent is friends with a person that is homosexual they are more likely to have positive feelings towards homosexuality and they were also less tolerant against bullying. While in the research study conducted at Lindenwood University most answers indicated that people have a positive attitude towards people that are homosexual, only 25 out of 50 participants said that they had a friend that was homosexual so this statement cannot be reproved by this study.

This study was worth accomplishing because every member of society should be able to live in an environment without being afraid of being scapegoated or picked on because of race, gender, sexual orientation or disability. Students at Lindenwood University that are homosexual can know now that they are well supported and do not need to hide their true feelings. The student community accepts all professors no matter what their sexual orientation is. This shows that Lindenwood University is a community in which every member of society can thrive and grow to be whatever they want to be in life.

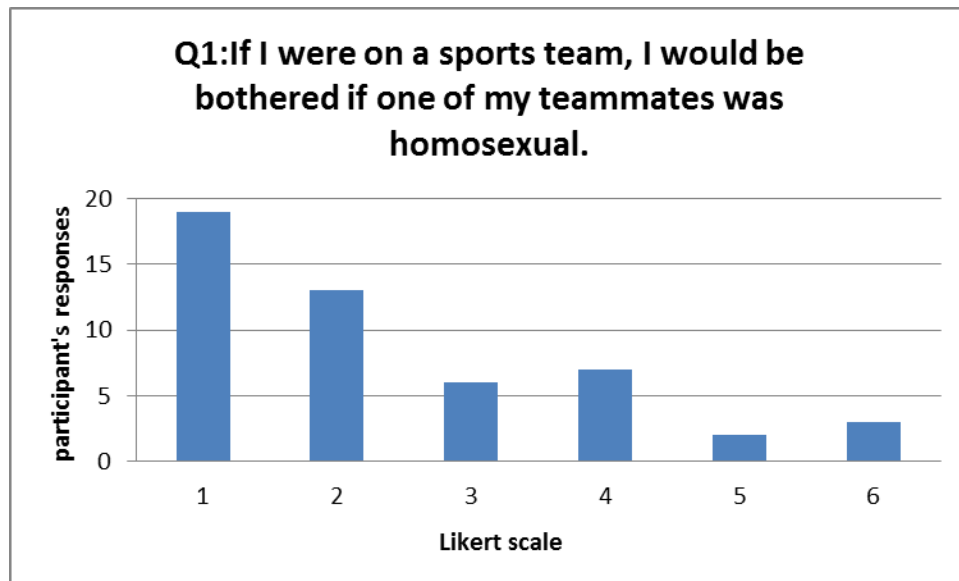
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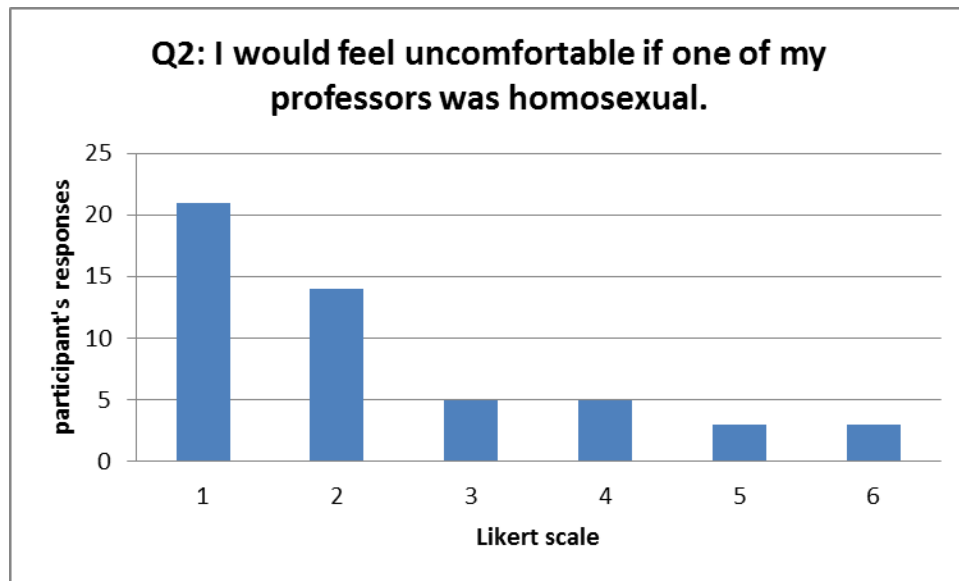
**Figure 1**

Figure 1. Q1: If I were on a sports team, I would be bothered if one of my teammates was homosexual.



**Figure 2**

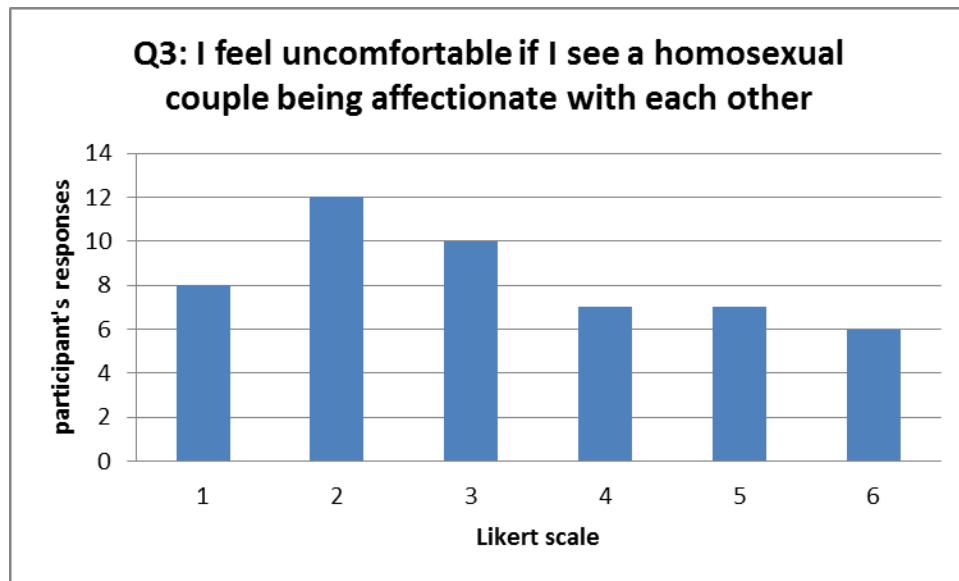
Figure 2. Q2: I would feel uncomfortable if one of my professors was homosexual.





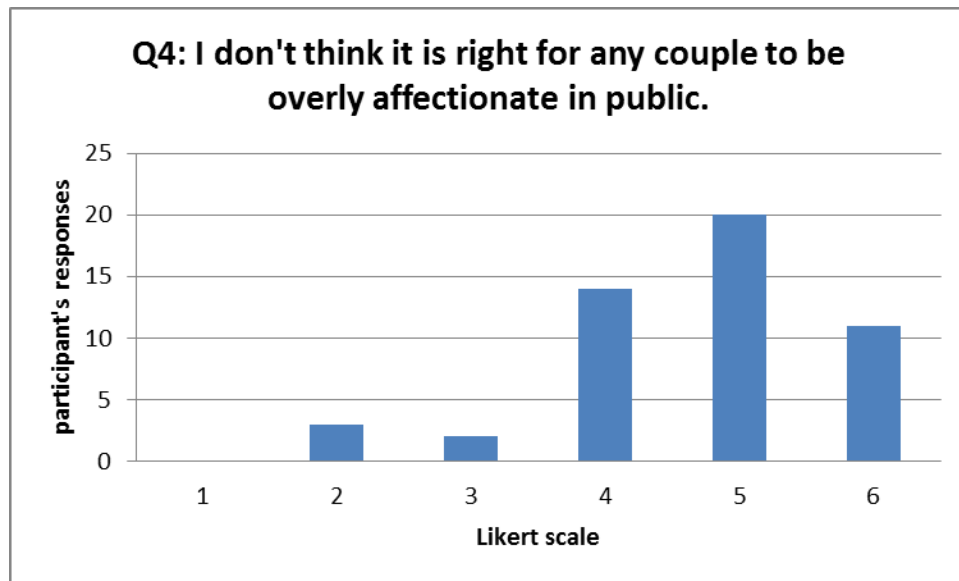
**Figure 3**

Figure 3. Q3: I feel uncomfortable if I see a homosexual couple being affectionate with each other.



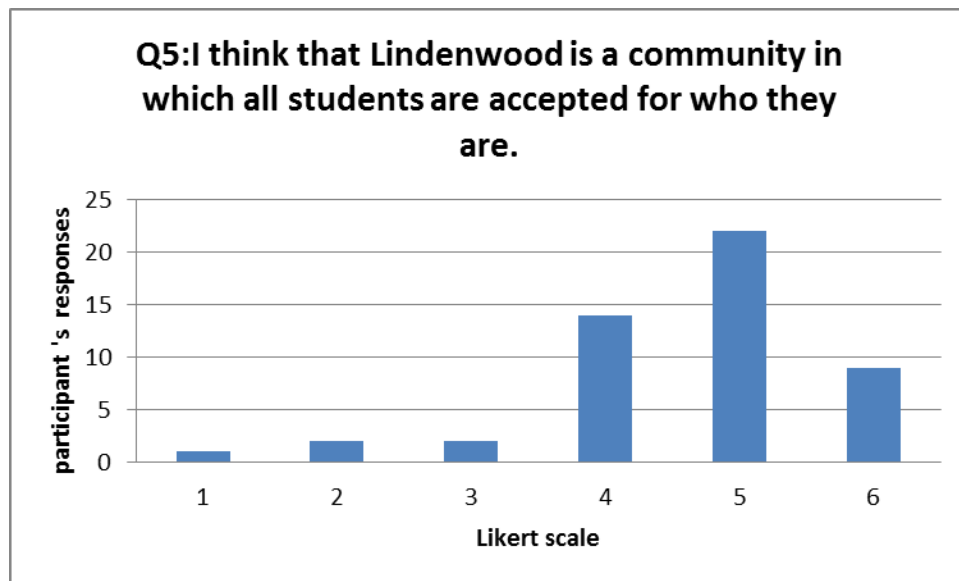
**Figure 4**

Figure 4. Q4: I don't think it is right for any couple to be overly affectionate in public.



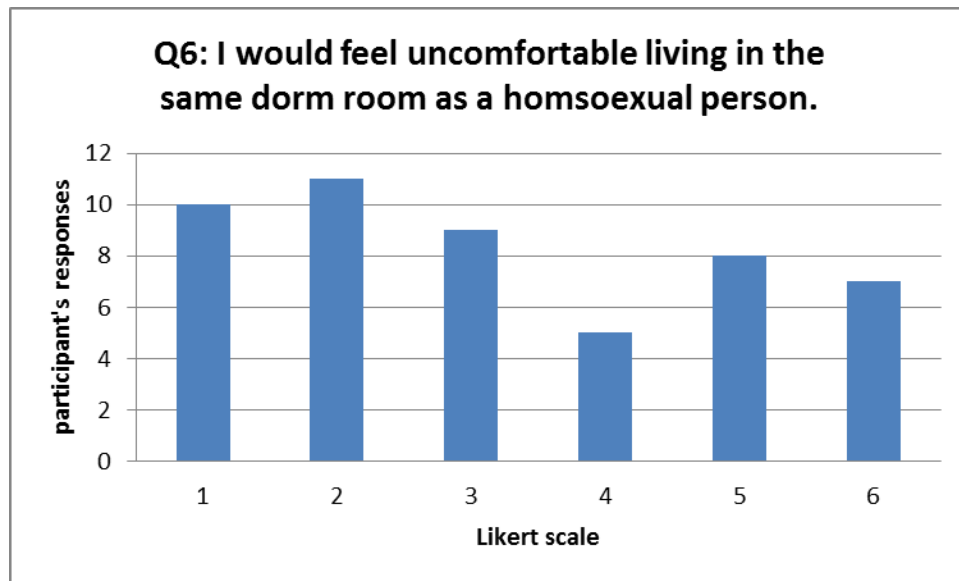
**Figure 5**

Figure 5. Q5: I think that Lindenwood is a community in which all students are accepted for who they are.



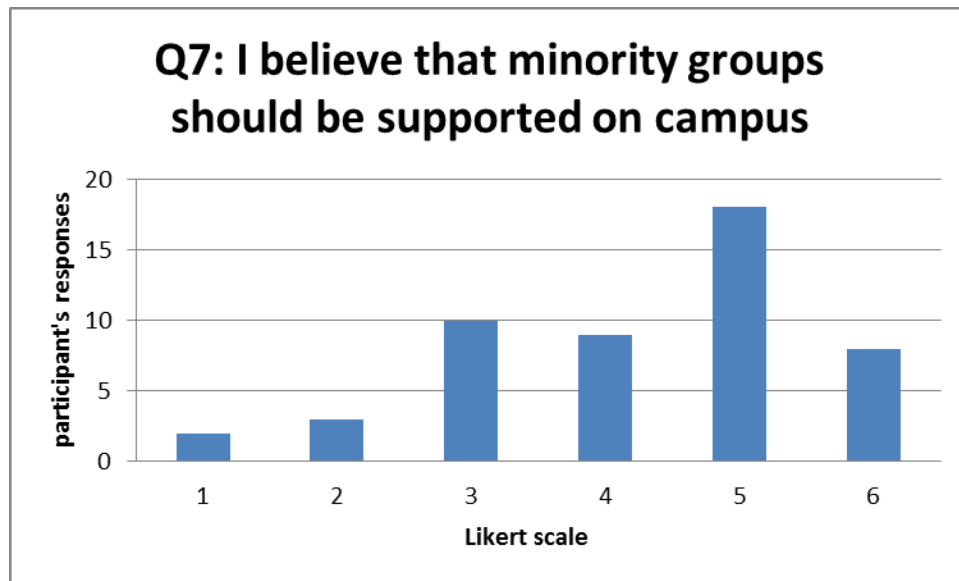
**Figure 6**

Figure 6. Q6: I would feel uncomfortable living in the same dorm room as a homosexual person.



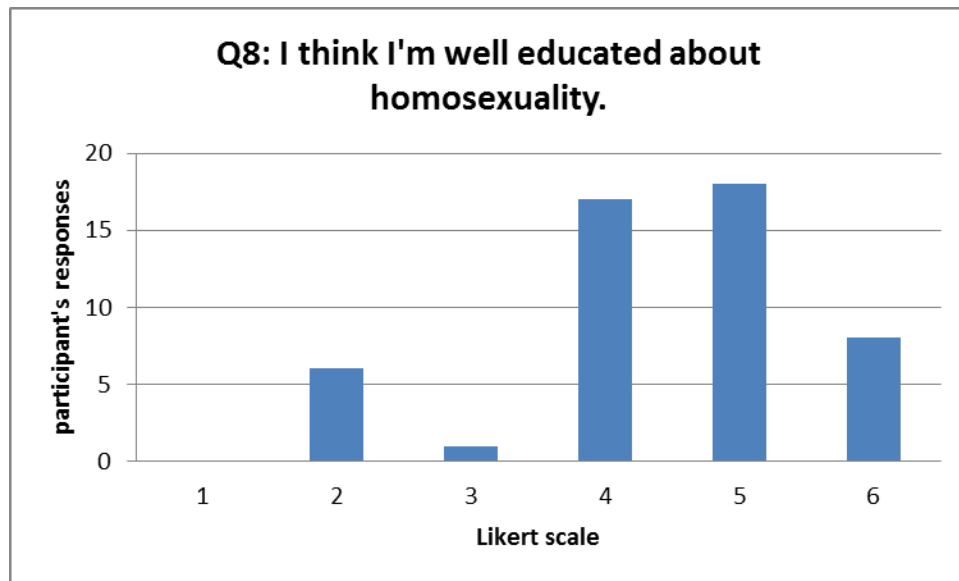
**Figure 7**

Figure 7. Q7: I believe that minority groups should be supported on campus.



**Figure 8**

Figure 8. Q8: I think I'm well educated about homosexuality.



## Appendix A

### Informed Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name), understand that I will be taking part in a research project that requires me to complete two short questionnaires: 1) one which requires me to provide simple demographic information about myself, 2) one which requires me to state my opinion on diverse people on campus. I understand that I should be able to complete this project within 15 minutes. I am aware that I am free to skip any questions in the unlikely event that I feel uncomfortable answering any of the items on any of the surveys. I am also aware that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. I should not incur any penalty or prejudice because I cannot complete the study. I understand that the information obtained from my responses will be analyzed only as part of aggregate data and that all identifying information will be absent from the data in order to ensure anonymity. I am also aware that my responses will be kept confidential and that data obtained from this study will only be available for research and educational purposes. I understand that any questions I may have regarding this study shall be answered by the researcher involved to my satisfaction. Finally, I verify that I am at least 18 years of age and am legally able to give consent or that I am under the age of 18 but have on file with the LPP office, a completed parental consent form that allows me to give consent as a minor.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of researcher obtaining consent)

Student Researcher's Name and Number: Jessica Preuschoff , 636 345 1116

Supervisor:

Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair

Course Instructor

(636)-949-4371

mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu

**Appendix B**

Demographic survey

- 1) What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3) What is your ethnicity/ your ethnic group? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4) What country are you from? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5) What is your relationship status (e.g. separated)? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 6) What is your sexual orientation? (Please circle the answer that fits you best)  
Heterosexual  
Homosexual  
Bisexual  
Other
-



## Appendix C

### Questionnaire

1. If I were on a sports team, I would be bothered if one of my teammates was homosexual.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6  
Strongly Disagree Mildly Mildly Agree Strongly  
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

2. I would feel uncomfortable if one of my professors was homosexual.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6  
Strongly Disagree Mildly Mildly Agree Strongly  
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

3. I feel uncomfortable if I see a homosexual couple being affectionate with each other.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6  
Strongly Disagree Mildly Mildly Agree Strongly  
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

4. I don't think it is right for any couple to be overly affectionate in public.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6  
 Strongly Disagree Mildly Mildly Agree Strongly  
 Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

5. I think that Lindenwood is a community in which all students are accepted for who they are.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6  
 Strongly Disagree Mildly Mildly Agree Strongly  
 Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

6. I would feel uncomfortable living in the same dorm room as a homosexual student.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6  
 Strongly Disagree Mildly Mildly Agree Strongly  
 Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

7. I believe that minority groups on campus like the GLBT community (Gay –Lesbian- Bisexual- Transgender community) should be supported.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6  
 Strongly Disagree Mildly Mildly Agree Strongly  
 Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

8. I think I am well educated about homosexuality.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6  
Strongly Disagree Mildly Mildly Agree Strongly  
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

9. I have witnessed a homosexual person being harassed on campus.

Yes No

10. I have a close friend who is homosexual.

Yes No

## **Appendix D**

### Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in my study. The present study was conducted in order to determine whether Lindenwood University is a prejudiced environment or not. The study focused on the acceptance of all kinds of relationships. My belief is that Lindenwood is a very diverse community and therefore little prejudiced if any will be found. If Lindenwood is indeed an accepting community more people are able to live their lives at Lindenwood without fear of being harassed because of their sexual orientation and therefore do not need to hide their true self.

Please note that I am not interested in your individual results; rather, I am only interested in the overall findings based on aggregate data. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings, nor will it be possible for me to trace your responses on an individual basis.

If you are interested in obtaining the final results of this study based on aggregate data, or if you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to let me know now or in the future. My contact information is found at the bottom of this letter.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator:

Jessica Preuschoff 636-345-1116 JP428@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

Supervisor:

Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair 636-949-4371 (mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu)